



**Department of
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News Release

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VA Evacuates Patients from Hurricane Area

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has successfully evacuated the most critically ill patients from the VA medical center in New Orleans. The evacuation of other patients, staff and family members continued Friday as the Department responds to Hurricane Katrina.

"The safety of our patients is paramount for all VA employees," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "The professionalism and bravery of VA employees is allowing us to evacuate our patients from two facilities, without mishap, during an unprecedented catastrophe."

Information about patients evacuated from the VA medical centers in New Orleans and Gulfport can be obtained toll-free at 1-800-507-4571.

Inpatients formerly at the Gulfport, Miss., VA Medical Center were transferred before the hurricane struck to other VA medical centers.

Ten inpatients on ventilators at the New Orleans VAMC were evacuated to the campus of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, La. before being transported to other medical centers in the region. Ninety eight additional patients were successfully evacuated Thursday using a VA truck convoy and flown via Air National Guard C-130s to Houston, Jackson, Miss., and Alexandria, La.

Evacuation of the remaining 94 patients in VA's New Orleans facility, along with 367 staff and family members, continued into the night Thursday and on Friday, and will continue until all have been safely relocated.

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Commemorating 75 Years of Service

The VA medical centers in New Orleans and Gulfport both sustained major storm damage. The Gulfport facility has been closed and the one in New Orleans will be closed after the last patients have been transferred.

"I salute our VA employees in all our Gulf Coast facilities for their courage, stamina and compassion," Nicholson said. "There is still much to be done, and we're diligently going about the task at hand."

VA officials are establishing procedures for family members to locate inpatients evacuated from the affected facilities. Officials are also finalizing procedures for veterans from the hurricane area to receive benefits checks and prescription drugs, and to ensure that VA employees continue to be paid.

"VA health care professionals from across the country are volunteering to care for our evacuees," Nicholson said. "We are moving quickly to ensure our veterans can continue to receive their regular health care and other benefits."

The volunteer corps of VA has assisted veterans for nearly 60 years, and Nicholson said people wishing to help should contact their nearest VA facility and ask for the Voluntary Service Office.

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